

We asked 10 school leaders of good and outstanding schools to share some of the ways that learning is organised in their schools. The quotes below illustrate some of the many different ways they seek to achieve a balance between teaching basic skills, subjects and thematic learning. Read some of the responses as a stimulus before considering the reflective questions below.

“Our curriculum is carefully planned as a **mix of integrated and discrete elements**. Where possible we use themes to enhance learning but recognise that this is not always appropriate for all aspects of the curriculum”

“We plan for **progression in all subjects** to ensure challenge. We also agree on ways to extend and deepen learning through topics and themes in long term planning.”

“Everything is **interlinked**. Subject specific language, ideas and skills are taught and a cross-curricular approach is used, especially when this makes learning more meaningful.”

“To ensure progression we have essential skills of literacy and numeracy **mapped across the curriculum**. The skills map is constantly revisited. We have termly curriculum days to monitor. “

“All literacy is linked with **thematic work alongside discrete** phonics daily and reading workshops. We carefully map literacy and numeracy skills across the whole curriculum. We also have themed weeks, such as climate week. There is a toolkit with advice on how to plan these weeks so that they have real rigour.”

“We really **emphasise the basics** as a strong foundation. We then build a **rich curriculum** on top of this. For example, we may have an art day or week where we train teachers to focus on particular skills, such as observational sketching, and this leads to high quality work and displays.”

“We adjust the **balance** between a focus on basic skills and other subjects to meet the needs of particular children if we feel particular gaps need filling.”

Our medium term plan identifies the skills and knowledge and how they are targeted at different groups. **Teachers always know where their children are** with regard to what they know, can do and understand. They use this knowledge to plan next steps.

The quotes below illustrate some of the many different approaches taken to **using time** creatively and effectively. Read some of the responses as a stimulus before considering the reflective questions below.

“We use time **flexibly** and **creatively** in order to suit our intentions and maximise learning. This includes a mix of traditional lessons, integrated days and themed weeks, such as Book week. Whatever we feel drives learning best!”

“We have a fixed timetable for our **specialist rooms** and spaces. Teachers review their use of time as a response to feedback from pupils. We are receptive, modifying what we do to best meet their needs. “

“We punctuate our timetable with the use of **immersion days** for specific curriculum areas. Children enjoy digging deeper into subjects and topics for full days to deepen learning and to apply skills purposefully. These days are also used to assist transition to secondary school.”

“We have created a **culture** of using time wisely and productively. We use phrases such as ‘making every second count’ or ‘60 minute lesson = 60 minutes learning’. In classrooms we also encourage independence, for example, children know to go straight to the ‘daily task’ ”

“We **block topics** across the year to make the most of planning time, resources and expertise. For example, Autumn is more humanities based with an emphasis on geography and history. In spring our key themes are science and technology based. This is linked to a skills map to show how children are making progress throughout the year.”

“We build in explicit **reflection** time in each class at the end of the day. Children reflect on their days learning and talk about what and how they have been learning. We organise deep learning days to make learning to learn skills explicit to children.”

“**Flexibility** is the key. Within our overall timetable we build in time for themed weeks, subject weeks, such as Creative Arts Week. We also have blocked units of study in DT and Art. We have the freedom to organise the day as appropriate but there is an entitlement to daily reading, handwriting and story.”

“Our normal way of working is flexible, using an integrated day mixed with whole class sessions.”